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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6289
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAEL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY 0359
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0153
RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 0077
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA PRIORITY 0039
RUEHBM/AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST PRIORITY 0093
RUEHUP/AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST PRIORITY 0024
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0072
RUEHDL/AMEMBASSY DUBLIN PRIORITY 0026
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PRIORITY 0020
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0029
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0535
RUEHLE/AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG PRIORITY 0023
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0289
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0088
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0504
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE PRIORITY 0089
RUEHPS/AMEMBASSY PRISTINA PRIORITY 0001
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0923
RUEHSF/AMEMBASSY SOFIA PRIORITY 0140
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0081
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0238
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA PRIORITY 0153
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY 0095
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB PRIORITY 0046
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0680
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0602

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000300

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: LUXEMBOURG/SYRIAN FM'S TUSSLE OVER IRAN
PRESIDENT'S REMARKS IN GENEVA

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (U) Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn visited Damascus April 22 and met with President Asad, VP Shara, and FM Muallim. According to press reports, the discussions between the two countries primarily focused on the finalization of the European Union/Syrian Association Agreement and on Palestinian reconciliation issues. The visit appeared to have gone off smoothly, save for the joint press conference between Muallim and Asselborn.

[1](#)2. (U) The otherwise cookie-cutter SARG press conference took an unusual turn after Muallim fielded a question on President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's April 20 speech at the UN anti-racism conference in Geneva. According to a privately-run media outlet Muallim said, "what Ahmadinejad said reflects the popular reactions in our region for Israel's crimes and its racist practices, Europeans hold part of the responsibility, because the policy of empty seats in such conferences is futile." Adding, "I appreciate the guilt of conscience Europeans feel towards the Holocaust, but they have to realize that Palestinians should not be victims of the Holocaust."

[1](#)3. (U) Asselborn was quick to defend his European compatriots and condemned Ahmadinejad. "I don't support what Ahmadinejad said, because what he said does not contribute towards

solving the problem or stability and in my personal opinion Ahmadinejad does not represent Iran, because there are other authorities and there is a generation that should be taken into consideration," he said. To this Muallim remarked, "Don't you believe in freedom of expression?" Asselborn responded, "That is an important point, but don't you think that Ahmadinejad and others should not deny the Holocaust?" Muallim retorted that Danish cartoonists had lampooned the prophet Mohammed and then Western government had defended the insulting images as a "press freedom."

¶4. (U) Asselborn fired back saying, "Syria has not achieved democracy yet," but was eventually able to right the train saying, "We, in the EU, wish to cooperate with Syrian and reach the partnership association agreement and we will do our best to reach this agreement next month." Adding, "I'm confident that Syria in the future will not remain on the U.S. black list, Syria is on the gray list and I believe that in the next year it will be on the white list."

¶5. (C) Comment: We find it unusual that Muallim picked this public spat with a representative of an (admittedly small) EU country working to support signature of Syria's EU Association Agreement. But we applaud Asselborn's moxie in fighting back.

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